

# **THE THREE VOICES OF FREIRE**

An Exploration of His Thought Over Time

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## **Introduction**

This paper is a first attempt to enter into critical conversation with Paulo Freire. I am interested in what I can learn about the applicability of Freire's theory for contemporary adult religious education by bringing into dialogue Freire with Freire's critics. This interest, however, remains implicit behind the text. I will focus on two of the critiques of Freire which bear most significantly, though not necessarily directly, on this particular educational concern.

This is a preliminary rather than an exhaustive investigation. For the critiques of Freire's theory, I rely on two summary works. For Freire's responses, I have read many though not all of his works, and I believe that the sources have been adequate for what I am attempting to do here.

## **Three Freires**

The paper will attempt to show the development of Freire's thinking through three stages: early, middle, and mature. Representing the early stages will be the works: *Educating for Critical Consciousness* (1969), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), and *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (1978). In these works, Freire presents his foundational ideas.

Almost immediately upon the release of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published before the earlier essays, Freire began to receive critical feedback. He

also became renowned at a time of tremendous revolutionary foment to which he added powerful and insightful stimulation through his timely ideas. As a result, he got to know many others who wanted to engage his ideas and was invited to speak in a variety of settings. His attempts to deal with the questions raised about his thoughts in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in these various contexts led to another stage in his writings, which I will call the middle stage. Grouped in this stage are the following works: “Literacy in Guinea-Bissau Revisited” from *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987), *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (1987), and *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990). All three of these works are transcribed dialogues with other educators.

A mature stage of Freire’s writings seems to be marked by several characteristics: serious reflection on his autobiography to help the reader to trace the origin and generation of his ideas; a less defensive review of the critiques of his thinking with indications of how he has adjusted his thinking in response or not, and a deeper reflection on his theory as a call to ethics in educational practice, which includes a far more explicit and forthright expression of the Christian faith that underlies all of it. In this stage, I would include the following works: *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992), *Paulo Freire on Higher Education* (1994), *Letters to Cristina* (1996), *Pedagogy of the Heart* (1997), and *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (1998).

## **Criticisms**

For the purpose of this paper, I will concern myself with two criticisms of Freire:

1. Freire's view of reality is too simplistic, too black and white. One is either an oppressor or oppressed. His rigid structuralist view of the world does not allow for the complexity which is there (Facundo 1984, 3, 5-6; Ohliger, ND).
2. Contradicting his own convictions about the mutual roles of teachers and learners and the freedom of the human subject, Freire's theory involves manipulation of the oppressed by outsiders who know better than they do how things should be (Facundo, 5, 6; Ohliger, 10-13).

## **Simplistic**

In order to understand why Freire opts for the particular perspective he uses to analyze social reality, one has to understand the context not only in which he writes but also in which he came to be as an adult. The geographic context, of course, is northeast Brazil. The social realities of that area were extreme. The rich and powerful lived alongside the destitute. The poor did not exist in small

pockets somewhat easy to avoid. They were so numerous as to be the vast majority of the inhabitants of the country, people whose lives were threatened by starvation on a daily basis and whose working situations barely changed that fact (Freire 1996, 15).

In his ten years of work at the Social Service of Industry (SESI), Regional Department of Pernambuco (“the most important political-pedagogical practice of my life” (1996, 81)) Freire formed his basic perspectives in relation to the social classes, education’s role in revolutionary transformation, the nature of knowledge, and pedagogical method for revolution (1996, 81-88). As Freire points out, this is the period “which I have called, in *Pedagogy of Hope*, the foundation time” (1996, 82). Given his continued reliance throughout his work on the same basic analytical framework evidenced in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it is apparent that his basic convictions never changed. After *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, however, there is a sharpening of focus as he nuances some of his convictions and clarifies others.

An important point is that Freire’s work at SESI brought him back into contact with the working-class people he knew in his youth after his family slipped into poverty (1996, 81). Freire knew significant poverty then (1996, 15, 26, 41). At the same time, he is aware that the poverty of those who find themselves permanently in what he calls the working class is a qualitatively

different and worse experience. Freire is therefore talking here about very significant poverty indeed, where hunger means starvation. This intimate knowledge of poverty and oppression fuels his analysis, and indeed, his whole life's work (1987, 28).

Freire's analysis of the nature of the class conflict is little changed even in the later years in which he wrote *Letters to Cristina*. For example, there he describes the work of SESI, in classic Marxist terms, as the paternalistic, bureaucratic charity of the dominant class in an attempt to alleviate some of the pressures of the class conflict while simultaneously reinforcing the status quo. He identifies this particularly in terms both of the objectification of those being helped and of the suspicion of the democratic processes of inclusion he attempted to initiate (1987, 82).

He characterizes the education carried out by the dominant class as "purely technical training" in contrast to a critical reading of the world. The goal of this education is to enable the working class to "reproduce itself as such" (1987, 83).

In this context, therefore, from the perspective of his personal as well as his professional experience, Freire found Marxist social analysis to be corroborated. The social reality was one in which there were those who enjoyed the benefits of material wealth at the same time that the majority of their national

fellows foundered in poverty. He perceived necessary connections between these two realities rooted in the social makeup of the country at that time, particularly in relation to its colonial past. He recognized that the wealthy had a stake in keeping things as they are, and that the poor somehow were unable to seize the power they had to change things.

It is the latter point that drives Freire so relentlessly. He believes that social reality is constructed by human beings in history. As such, humans can construct a new social reality if they choose to. His analysis of the present situation tells him that human beings are in a dehumanized situation—be they the oppressed or the oppressors—which logically calls for creative human action to correct and humanize. He believes that such a future can be constructed, and he worries that if this is not the kind of future that people work toward, then the construction of the future will continue to be in the hands of those who promote and benefit from the dehumanizing status quo (1970, 27-28; 1973, 12).

Freire's project is therefore wrought with urgent ethical concerns. There is no choice but to act. What Freire makes clear is that the *apparent* choice *not* to act is, in the ethical perspective he takes, actually a decision *to act* in a way that continues the status quo and thus dehumanizes all people, that perpetuates injustice, and that assures the present unjust situation will continue into perpetuity.



The real source of Freire's ethical urgency is not stated in his early works, though there are hints there. For example, Freire points out that what led him to Marx was his conviction that the dehumanization he saw all around him could not be justified from a Christian perspective. Marx provided him with a way to analyze the reality so that his desire to see justice might be realized in a practical way (1996, 187).

Also, Freire's conviction that the human vocation is to greater humanization is expressed in his early works as if it is a self-evident fact (1970, 28). One who does not know Freire might wonder on what basis he makes this statement. In fact, some of his critics are mystified by his use of apparently Christian concepts in texts which never or rarely explicitly make a connection between faith and the theories put forth. Freire, a man known and later publicly confessed to possess deep faith (1997, 104), avoided such references, evidently in an attempt to appeal to as broad an audience as possible.

In the early stage, another factor contributing to a rather fixed view of the world may have been the way Freire's theory apparently presents liberative education almost as equivalent to revolutionary activity. He writes as if education for literacy is the primary means for animating a revolutionary consciousness in the oppressed (1970, 40). At the same time, Freire confesses that he has no concrete experience with revolutionary cultural action. Rather, in *Pedagogy of*

*the Oppressed*, he is attempting to apply to that reality the experiences he has had with dialogical and problem-posing education (1970, 24).

Freire apparently worked in Guinea-Bissau with this conviction, although the seeds are there for a reconsideration. Freire constantly refers to literacy education in Guinea-Bissau as one aspect of a total plan for society (1978, 9). Yet, because Freire's theory attempts to wed these two realities and because he does so in the context of highly conflictual situations, there is such a complete politicization of literacy education that the distinction between the work of literacy education and revolutionary cultural production is not consistently maintained in his writing (1978, 11). One thus finds a tension in Freire's writing between the prime value he places on the role of education in the revolutionary project and his recognition that education is only one part of that project (1978, 25).

As Freire became better known with the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he began to receive invitations to speak and work in other countries, one of which was to be Guinea-Bissau. As a result, he was exposed to other social realities more complex than Brazil, and he was forced to explore the value and implications of his theory in places like Guinea-Bissau and the United States.

His writings in this middle period hint at the struggle he had in making

people aware that it is a misinterpretation of his work to think that it can simply be imported into any social situation. He was passionate that his thought should not be reduced to a mechanical method, for that would be in direct contradiction to his thinking. Likely, this was not enough to address the concerns being raised. There was something more fundamentally problematic about the theory when attempts were made to apply it in more complex social situations. In facing this, Freire seems to have been led to reassess the ability of Marxist social analysis to interpret adequately the reality of developed, democratic, capitalist countries, for example. This provokes him to a less-than certain conviction about attempting to apply Marxist analysis universally and the recognition that a different kind of analysis may be necessary for more complex societies, even though the basic insights and convictions remain (1987, 111).

Furthermore, in the later assessment of his work in Guinea-Bissau, and following the publication of *Pedagogy in Process*, Freire begins to articulate much more explicitly and clearly the limits of education's role in the process of social transformation. Interestingly, Freire makes this point clear specifically in response to a question regarding the role of literacy in an emancipation struggle taking place in a highly complex situation such as the conflictual language situation of Guinea-Bissau. This suggests that the complexity of that situation led Freire to clarify his perspective on this question. He first clarifies his own

understanding of the goals of literacy education and goes on to state (1987, 106):

Even in this global sense, literacy by itself should never be understood as the triggering of social emancipation of the subordinated classes. Literacy leads to and participates in a series of triggering mechanisms that need to be activated for the indispensable transformation of a society whose unjust reality destroys the majority of people.

Among the critiques of Freire, one finds more pointed questions being raised about the revolutionary burden education is being asked to bear in his early work. He is criticized for suggesting that social reality will be transformed primarily through educational practice (Ohlinger, nd, 12; Freire 1994, 30). This early assessment of his experiences in Guinea-Bissau apparently is the beginning of an effort to clarify this point. No doubt, the critiques he received in relation to this point not only helped him to clarify his own thinking, but also forced him in his writing to be much more explicit about the limitations of the role education can play in the social transformation process. This is clearly evident in the middle stage (e.g., 1987, 31).

Also, as Freire dialogs with others during this middle stage, he confronts questions related to the application of his theory to various educational contexts and in diverse social realities. One issue relates to the question of higher education. He begins to nuance his position on the one hand by talking about research. He ties research to his understanding by expressing its vital connection

to the teaching that accompanies and follows research. He sees them as two moments in a single process. In this way, he maintains both the value of research as well as its unity with teaching as a political activity, thus asserting the political nature of research as well. In the process, Freire is clearly concerned to assert the value he sees in intellectual activity. Apparently, the tendency of some of his readers is to interpret his emphases in the revolutionary context on the value of common-sense knowledge, on the equality of the educator and the learners, on the necessary unity between learning and acting, etc., as a repudiation of the importance of intellectual activity such as research. Freire, as an intellectual himself, is quick to point out the contradiction in this interpretation, but also insists on the political nature of intellectual activity and therefore the ethics related to that characteristic (1994, 62-63; 1987, 8-9).

He also addresses the issue of the place of formal education in societies which are not as highly conflictual as that of Brazil or at such a neglected stage of educational development as Guinea-Bissau. Remembering that the context of his theorizing was primarily in community-based adult literacy programs, the issue of formal education has not been at the center of his attention. This fact, however, did not stop educators in formal contexts from attempting to apply his thinking to their contexts. Nor did it stop Freire from trying to engage the questions that arose from this effort. As a result, many themes arise which are to become central

to his later work: the role of experiential or common-sense learning, the nature of the relationship between the educator and the learner, the place of the content educators are expected to teach, the need for academic rigor, the practicality of dialogical learning, the concern about manipulation related to the political choices of the educator, and the authority of the educator in relation to the learners (1987, passim; 1990, passim).

In his mature stage, Freire is far more careful to nuance his use of Marxist social analysis and his understanding of the role that education plays in the process of liberation. He recognizes that some societies are not as marked by class conflict as his earlier works might have suggested. Rather, he seems more inclined to see it as one possible interpretation, one helpful way for analyzing social reality. The later Freire is as passionate about injustice and the need to overcome it as the early Freire, and his fundamental perspective still betrays a Marxist class analysis. However, he is more aware that the conflict in some contemporary societies is not as absolute or extreme as he witnessed them in Brazil in the 1960's when he wrote his early books. He clarifies his perspective in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992, 90):

I have never labored under the misapprehension that social classes and the struggle between them could explain everything, right down to the color of the sky on a Tuesday evening. And so I have never said that the class struggle, in the modern world, has been or is 'the mover of history.' On the other hand, still today,

and possibly for a long time to come, it is impossible to understand history without social classes, without their interests in collision. The class struggle is not the mover of history, but it is certainly one of them.

His later works also show a greater preoccupation with formal education processes than his earlier works did, no doubt as a result of the fact that most education taking place in the world is in the formal context. The journey of Freire's life, as evidenced in his later work, seems to have taken him from seeing education as key to the revolutionary struggle to right the wrongs of class conflict as apprehended through Marxist analysis to a somewhat more explicitly faith-based passion that societies will be more just and humane through the assistance of an ethically responsible education for critical consciousness.

For example, in *Pedagogy of the Heart*, Freire reflects on the essential role played by hope in the process of transformation. Without hope put into practice, there will be no transformation of injustice into greater justice. He puts the process in terms that echo a concern with prophetic speech—annunciation and denunciation—and speaks of the critical act of unveiling as revelation (1997, 8, 90ff).

In his last work, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire speaks of his vocation in terms which implicitly betray both its spiritual nature as well as its personal nature (more explicitly), as a passion which flows out of his love for his fellow

human beings:

The knowledge that underpins the 'crossing over' required of me to diminish the distance between me and the perverse reality of the exploited is the knowledge grounded in an ethical code that will not permit the exploitation of men and women by other men and women. But this kind of knowledge is insufficient. It needs something more. It needs to become a kind of passion. An enthusiasm capable of rapture. In addition to that, it needs to be part of a whole body of other types of concrete reality and of the power of ideology (1998, 122).

In the process, he has not betrayed but deepened his most fundamental insights.

Analysis: The critique is accurate, and Freire's development in thinking has been assisted by it. What we are left with is a fundamentally important observation about reality which is rooted in Freire's recognition of the human role in the construction of reality: that one is either acting to increase justice or one is cooperating in maintaining the status quo of injustice. He thus promotes a dynamic view of reality that has many important implications which go far beyond the question of education, though this has always been his preoccupation.

Human beings are most truly themselves when they act with responsibility in history.

### **Manipulative**

From the beginning, Freire believes that there is a need for intervention on



the part of radicals. This aspect of Freire's thinking never goes away. He sees the role of the teacher as an interventionist's role, following Lukács. Having already defined the reality of those in whose interest it is to oppress others as false and therefore as immune to critique (what is false cannot be critically evaluated without exposing its falsehood), Freire perceives that oppressed persons need to be able to critique reality so as to begin to see it in its true light and over against the false reality of oppressors. In order for this to occur, since the oppressed are immersed in the false reality promoted by the oppressors and since the oppressors have a stake in keeping them thus immersed, intervention has to occur:

...Lukács is unquestionably posing the problem of critical intervention: "To explain to the masses their own action" is to clarify and illuminate that action.... The more the people unveil this challenging reality which is to be the object of their transforming action, the more critically they enter that reality.. In this way they are "consciously activating the subsequent development of their experiences" (1970, 38).

Freire carefully nuances Lukács' phrase, "to explain." In characteristic Freire fashion, he replaces this phrase with the phrase "to dialogue with." This simple change speaks volumes by and about Freire. Absolutely committed to consistency between theory and practice, Freire cannot escape the implications of his demand that the process of education be a democratic as well as a critical process, that learners are treated as Subjects equal to the educator, that mutual respect characterize all relations within the educational process. Therefore, it is

easy to see that while Freire is convinced, given his analysis of oppressive relations, that the reality will not change without intervention, he is also committed to an intervention rooted in an ethic of absolute respect for the dignity as human Subjects of all those involved (1970, 38).

It must be remembered that Freire is writing as an intellectual and as a member of the middle class, despite his childhood experience of poverty. As such, he is convinced of the role that he and others like him can and must play in the transformation of society. Therefore, the concept of intervention as a responsibility of educators is central to his theory. Without this concept, his theory is groundless. As he points out in this regard: “The pedagogy of the oppressed, which is the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation, has its roots here” (1970, 38; 1973, 16-20).

Still, the requirement of consistency moves him to qualify this point. Since there is no room in his theory for paternalism and since responsible participation is the goal of his practice, the educator must aim to include those who gain consciousness of their subjectivity in the development of the educational process: “No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors” (1970, 39).

Freire drives home the strongly ethical nature of this aspect of his theory

as he continues to discuss intervention, even in his earliest work. Vital to the nature of the interventions is his understanding of dialogue, which he develops in depth and often in his writing. For Freire, intervention cannot happen except in the nature of dialogue. In trying to characterize dialogue as he understands it in this context, he employs rich images which place strict demands on the educator. He talks about it as “horizontal relationship between two persons,” “communication” and “intercommunication,” as a “relation of ‘empathy’ between two ‘poles’ who are engaged in a joint search,” as “nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust.” He defines the opposite of dialogue—anti-dialogue—as a vertical, top-down relationship (1973, 45-46). In discussing the preparation of coordinators of education programs, he expresses the same ideas using Buber’s profoundly evocative image of the I-Thou relationship (1973, 52).

The astute reader cannot but notice the religious connotations in Freire’s use of such words as “love, humility, hope, faith, and trust,” “conversion,” and the “I-Thou relationship.” By using these words, Freire is suggesting a parallel between the ethic expected of an educator in this process and that of one called to a religious vocation. Freire, that is, is talking about a sacred trust. For him, no doubt, given his faith, this is adequate to communicate his conviction that such a relationship is completely free of manipulation or any other kind of attitude that might compromise the full human dignity of the other person. For his readers who are more secular in orientation, however, this evocative language may not communicate as effectively as he may have thought it did the ethical responsibility of the educator intervening in the oppressive situation.

On the other hand, given the internalization of the oppressor by the oppressed in his analysis, Freire indicates how an inauthentic conversion to the

oppressed by those from the oppressor class can cause them to stumble into the pitfall of misinterpreting the oppressed persons' way of thinking and being and thereby be seduced into thinking that the one intervening must act on behalf of the oppressed rather than with them. Because of the internalization of the oppressor by the oppressed, intervention is necessary. Without interaction, the oppressed will not begin to perceive the vulnerability of the oppressor, nor will they achieve the "moment of awakening" which must precede their belief in themselves and their organizing the struggle for liberation. However, Freire warns against using the dependence of the oppressed in a manipulative way. This continues to dehumanize them. Instead, the liberating pedagogue knows that "while no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others. Liberation, a human phenomenon, cannot be achieved by semihumans" (1970, 53).

While there is not much more to be added to these ideas from Freire's perspective, the charge of manipulation and the right to intervene critically in the reality of learners continues to hound him in his middle stage. Therefore, he is led to deepen his reflections. In his dialogue with Ira Shor, in addition to reiterating some ideas about dialogue and about the non-authoritarian directiveness required of the educator, Freire discusses the issue of intervention from the perspective of the educator. Recognizing that liberating educators are

swimming against the stream of dominant ideology, Freire affirms that they must therefore have certain virtues in order to accomplish their dream. His emphasis here goes hand-in-hand with his pronounced recognition of the limitations of liberating education, limitations which he points out are present due to the very power of that education. Because of its power, the dominating forces attempt to limit the space in which liberating education can be practiced. Under these circumstances, Freire talks about the courage needed by educators without using the word. Instead, he speaks of necessary and unnecessary fear. He recognizes the need for fear, but calls the educator to test the limits of fear and to push to those limits the space occupied by liberating education. The emphasis here is not so much on the limitations of the role of the teacher as intervener, but on the recognition of the limitations that are going to be in place anyway, and a call to act responsibly in the face of those limitations. This confirms Freire's conviction that intervention in the learners' reality is necessary to the role of the educator (1987, 177).

Perhaps it is in his dialogue with Myles Horton that Freire comes closest to identifying the best criterion for judging the ethical quality of intervention by the liberating educator. In response to Horton's question about what Freire considers to be legitimate authority, Freire states the following: "...this is the road in which we walk, something that comes from outside into autonomy, something

that comes from inside. That is the result” (1990, 187). Unfortunately, Freire does not pursue this thought here. Still the criterion is clear: if the intervention of the educator does not lead to the autonomy of the learner, then it is not liberating education. Naturally, this raises many other issues.

In his later work, Freire returns more directly to the topic. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, he is clearly defensive regarding criticisms related to this area. He states bluntly, and one must admit fairly accurately, that those who accuse him of cultural invasion are charging him with precisely that which he criticizes and works against. He is offended by suggestions that he is elitist and arrogant and disrespectful of the culture and identity of oppressed persons. He rightly insists that the charge is based on a misinterpretation of the concept of *conscientização*. He also protests that those who think that intervention is equivalent to manipulation have a naive, apolitical view of education practice, idealistically oriented to the advancement of humanity as an abstract concept. Finally, he introduces a new thought into the issue that suggests that his thinking has indeed been somewhat shaped by the criticism, so that he is forced to acknowledge an aspect of the practice that he has not articulated in the same way before: it involves risk (1992, 77).

Before discussing that, Freire centers on the need for teachers to respect the learners. Such respect, of the nature discussed above, is adequate to address

the concerns raised about invasion. Such respect, which is mutual, permits the educator to have a vision for the process of education and even to articulate, defend, and promote that vision, but also on the other hand to defend and promote criticism of that vision and to provide the space and the environment for learners to create their own visions: “Respecting them means, on the one hand, testifying to them of my choice, and defending it; and on the other, it means showing them other options, whenever I teach—no matter what it is that I teach” (1990, 78)!

Then Freire does something he has apparently not done before. He acknowledges that in his system, there is the risk of manipulation: “Is there risk of influencing the students? It is impossible to live, let alone exist, without risks. The important thing is to prepare ourselves to be able to run them well” (1990, 79). From this statement, Freire begins to articulate the ethical responsibilities of the liberating educator. These reflections become central to his later work. Freire speaks especially about democratic practice and the ways in which authoritarianism (which is always manipulative) contradict it. Pointing out that he has dealt with the appropriate attitudes necessary for liberating educators in his earlier works, Freire goes on to reflect more deeply on the ethics of educational intervention. He talks about defeating elitist, authoritarian, non-dialogical attitudes through the practice of certain virtues necessary to the educational act: humility, consistency, tolerance, “in the exercise of a consistency that ever

decreases the distance between what we say and what we do” (1990, 80). For Freire, the bottom line is respect, but respect understood in the rich way he discussed it in his earliest works.

Taking up the criticism of cultural invasion again, Freire points out that critique of culture is necessary to assist the process of moving beyond the level of knowledge at the lived-experience level, or common-sense knowledge to “the knowledge emerging from more rigorous procedures of approach to knowable objects” (1990, 83). Then Freire does a most wonderful turnabout on the criticism of manipulation and cultural invasion:

And to make this shift belongs to the popular classes by right. Hence, in the name of respect for the culture of the peasants, for example, not to enable them to go beyond their beliefs regarding self-in-the-world and self-with-the-world betrays a profoundly elitist ideology. It is as if revealing the ... why of things, and to have a complete knowledge of things, were or ought to be the privilege of the elite (1990, 83).

However, in *Paulo Freire on Higher Education*, he goes much further.

He finally admits that attempting to persuade students about a particular political option is a necessary aspect of liberating education. As he says:

There is no liberating education without some measure of manipulation; there is no such thing as angelical purity. The important thing is to know which is the predominant space between liberation and manipulation; that is the issue (1994, 36).

Freire has come a long way to this admission, but in getting here, he has



finally arrived at the central concern that has driven him all along, in my opinion. Freire has always written out of a faith stance, although he seldom explicitly says so. At the heart of this faith stance is the call to conversion, to action on behalf of God's justice, the God who is especially attentive to the cry of the poor. A particular understanding of how the world should be—an understanding that reflects the Reign of God—animates this call. What Freire admits here is not set in opposition to freedom, for it is always an invitation and always recognizes the freedom of human subjects to accept it or not. However, it is a compelling vision, an irresistible one of which Freire is convinced. He is also convinced that others will find that call irresistible if they hear it, recognizing the inextricable way in which all humanity is connected.

Therefore, one sees more clearly in his mature work that Freire is really describing a vocational choice, as stated above, that explains his use of Easter symbolism in his early work and suggests that his understanding of this role is shaped by his Christian imagination which knows that the human situation is hopeless without the intervention of a loving and compassionate God. He also recognizes that the Christian call to responsible human relationships is not optional to the ontological nature of human beings, that it is indeed essential. Therefore, he can spend his life trying to convince others who may not share his Christian convictions of their responsibility. This is what he has done for

educators and for those whom they educate.

## **Conclusion**

Out of the context of Freire's personal and professional experience, the desires of his heart and spirit, and the restless searching of his fertile mind, Freire was moved to bring together various lines of thought current in his day to respond to a very personal question: what contribution does an educator make to creating a more just society, a more humane world?

From the beginning, one can see that his preoccupation was less about what an educator does than with how the educator thinks about the role of education. Hence, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for example, much more space is taken up by theoretical rather than methodological considerations. This becomes even more true of his later works.

As such, an appreciation of Freire necessarily begins with an understanding of his context and an appreciation for the novel and significant way he tried to address his pedagogical concerns in that context. From the beginning, Freire argued that adaptation of his thinking was necessary in order to apply it to other contexts. Later, he would be clearer that his frequent remarks about right and wrong, true and false, authentic and inauthentic, etc. had to be understood from the perspective of his context. His apparent dogmatism had more to do with

his insistence on consistency than with authoritarian rigidity. In fact, he condemns the latter over and over in his writing.

The charge is further belied by the example of openness Freire displays throughout his life. Always willing and ready to defend his opinions when he believes them defensible, he also displays a constant willingness to amend his theories when necessary. In fact, he is willing to change radically his primary theoretical assumptions when he recognizes that they can no longer be defended in contexts very different from the one in which he began. He admits, for instance, that Marxist analysis is not adequate to explain all social relations. He recognizes that education will not play the primary role in bringing about social transformation. He admits that the methods he developed for literacy education need to be modified in light of newer theories of learning. He affirms that human beings are conditioned and limited in their freedom to transform reality.

Yet, Freire never lost sight of the vision that kept him hopeful as an educator: human beings are not objects but subjects of history who construct their social reality. As such, they can choose to be either responsible or irresponsible in its construction. A critical education is an essential tool through which humans can be enabled to take a more responsible stance in relation to their future. When education does not do so, it is fostering an irresponsible stance, not to mention colluding in injustice.

Therefore, Freire's real interest eventually takes center stage in his writing: the ethics of educational practice. As a vital social tool, education can be used to assist either in the process of humanization or of dehumanization. Freire insists that justice can be served only when educators intentionally work for the sake of humanization. His great insight is that educators do not have the luxury of not choosing. It's one or the other.

Freire, then, has spent his life being an educator of educators, driving home and trying his best to elucidate their ethical responsibility, unveiling their reality so as they might become more critical in relation to it. His passion to do so was based on is Christian faith in what humans are capable of, hope for what we can accomplish, and love for all people, and especially for the oppressed.

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